

SPRING EDITION		
-----------------------	--	--

Editorial Notes...by RC:

We are pleased to announce that the M/C mailing list has risen to 37 from the 17 achieved by December. However our list of the last known addresses and phone numbers of A.T. Company "associates" (members and friends) remains at 51. You might want to take a look at the list on page 6 to see if you can provide us with corrections for any of the addresses listed. Particularly for the four where delivery in November was attempted but unsuccessful...and for the indented, italicized ones, from whom we haven't heard during the past four months or so. I've found it to be very rewarding that so many of the wives and even children of our deceased buddies remain interested enough in what we have to report in the M/C to want to remain in contact with us. Jean Blake, Mary Coldwell, Michelle (Groves) Krause, Janet Moir, Grace Raze, and Connie Rogers all took special pains to write or otherwise tell us of that continued interest...Ladies, I thank you.

Mary Coldwell also shared with me copies of correspondence she'd compiled during the time she worked for the Red Cross dispensing doughnuts, coffee, and companionship to GIs like us and her then, soon-to-be husband, 3rd Platoon's Bob Coldwell. She also told me that the 75th was followed into the AAC by the 45th and 70th divisions, something I guess I didn't know or else had forgotten.

Rob Smith has agreed to share with you some of his memories of Porthcawl. They generally parallel those of Bill Sheridan printed in the December 1999 Edition of the M/C. Before getting into them, however, you may be interested in a brief summary of Rob's biography, service as well as civilian. His army career began 27 March 1943 when he was sworn in at Grand Central Palace, NYC, processed at Camp Upton, Long Island, N.Y., and subsequently received basic infantry training at Camp Croft, Spartanburg, South Carolina. Upon qualifying for the Army Specialized Training Program, he was sent to its STAR unit at Clemson University and thence to Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, N.Y. He had completed two terms of basic engineering there before the Army chose to close its ASTP program in the Spring of 1943. Transferred to the 75th, then on maneuvers near Camp Polk, Louisiana, he was assigned to the 290th's AntiTank Company. Though assigned to the 2nd squad of the 1st platoon as a 57mm antitank gun crewman, his typing skills prompted an additional assignment as or-

derly room clerk where he maintained company records and processed its paper work. 1st Sergeant Woodard (preceding Orland Parsons) couldn't type and needed the help. By mid-October Rob was returned full time to the 2nd squad, as the Division moved to Camp Shanks, N.Y. for overseas staging and ultimate shipment to the ETO.

Some of his recollections from the crucial period 24-26 December 1944 are quoted here. They were written for Al Roxburgh's PKG in May 1994, and through an oversight, never before appeared in the M/C.

"December 24 (1944): The 290th Combat Team was assembled in an area in and around Biron, Belgium. During the morning, the 1st Platoon led by Lt. Dal Raze, set up road blocks on the road running north from Hotton to Biron. We saw no enemy in our vicinity but we could hear the sound of heavy shelling to our south. Occasionally, some of the tanks of the 3rd AD would pass where the 2nd Squad gun was dug in at the edge of the road. The 290th was attached to the 3rd Armored Division and I wondered if I would run into my brother who was a tank commander with the 3rd. Time and circumstances did not permit me to pursue finding him and I did not learn until many mail calls later that he had already been evacuated to England.

"Late in the afternoon of the same day we withdrew from the roadblock positions and assembled in a small farm house near Hotton to be briefed on our next mission. We were to set up positions in the vicinity of the town of Ny, Belgium to defend the Soy-Hotton Road against a break-through by German tanks in the immediate area." [Bill Sheridan of the 1st Platoon's 1st squad, narrates a related recollection: "At approximately six p.m. we rolled into Hotton and were immediately dispatched to set up our guns along the Hotton-Soy Road, close to where the road from Ny crosses the Soy-Hotton Road. Rob Smith's gun was close to this crossroad; my gun was perhaps 500 yards up the road in the direction of Soy; the third gun was at Soy. At this time, we had no knowledge of the presence of the 517th PIR's paratroops patrolling the area. We believed ourselves to be quite alone, within hearing distance of the enemy as they rode their motorcycles about. Except for some light shelling, they made no move toward our positions. Shortly after midnight we heard and saw the battle at Ny. What I now realize is that this action took place to our rear and the 560th Volksgrenadier units may have crossed the Hotton-Soy Road close by our isolated gun positions. I suspect they crossed to the right of Rob Smith's position toward Hotton."]

Rob Smith continues: "At the briefing I can recall being told to synchronize our watches and also that there was a complaint about a shortage of watches in the 2nd Squad. Someone in the group facetiously suggested that if you need a watch, take one from a dead German. I sometimes wonder why, after fifty years, I still remember this trivial incident.

"Lt. Raze directed the platoon's three 57mm guns be placed in a large clearing facing the Soy-Hotton Road. I remember a wooded area to our rear and to our right flank. The 1st Squad was perhaps 75 yards on the left flank of the 2nd Squad's gun and we had visual contact. At the time, I was assistant gunner on the #2 gun. I do not recall the placement of #3 gun, so perhaps we did not have visual contact. I can remember the bitter cold, the frost and the frozen earth making it next to impossible to dig the guns in. The noise our tools made in placing the guns drew enemy fire, but fortunately we suffered no casualties. The Germans could probably hear us better than see us. The ground was so frozen and rocky, I found it impossible to dig my own fox hole and finally settled for a "crouch" hole close to the gun. I recall that night as never ending. S/Sgt. Rivetti, our squad leader, ordered half the squad on the alert and the other half resting, changing shifts every two hours until dawn. The night finally ended and we were spared any conflict with the German tanks.

"December 25, (1944): Christmas Day dawned bright and clear, repeating the bitter temperatures of the previous day. Captain Rudy Gillen, our CO, inspected our gun position in the early morning and made a promise of hot chow which was later kept. Captain Gillen observed my shallow fox hole and advised me to keep at it. - - Another piece of useless trivia in my memory bank.

"About midday a flight of P38s appeared overhead for which we were at first grateful. However, a single pilot mistook our positions for the enemy's and dive bombed the #1 gun position, killing PFC Carl Seig and blowing off Cpl. Nick Uremovich's leg. **Carl Seig was AT Company's first KIA.** Years later I read in A Time for Trumpets about a flight of P38s on Christmas Day that mistakenly bombed and strafed a formation of U.S. Armor, thinking they were Germans. I wonder now if the P38 that bombed AT Company was part of this same group.

"December 26, (1944): I draw a blank on remembering any event of note on the day after Christmas. Maybe it was a repeat of many days in the Ardennes that winter. Or perhaps we can only remember the grief we all felt in losing Carl Seig and the maiming of Nick Uremovich on the previous day. AT Company held the defense line in the Ny area for the remainder of December. In

early January 1945 we moved to new positions on the road to Beffe, Belgium."

Rob was a Corporal with the A.T. Company throughout most of his tour in the Ardennes, Colmar, the Ruhr Valley, and during Occupation duties in Hohenlimburg, Germany that ended 3 June. He and the rest of A.T. Company left Germany for the Reims, France area, arriving there on 5 June, assigned to Camp St. Louis in the Assembly Area Command. That assignment came to an end 27 June 1945 when the company was broken up, assigned to other units for redeployment to the States. He and several others from the First and Headquarters platoons were transferred to the A.T. Company of the 2nd ID's 38th Infantry Regiment at Camp Lucky Strike in the Le Havre area. The 2nd was assembling for return to Texas and eventual deployment to the Pacific Theater for the invasion of Japan, Operation "Downfall", slated to commence 1 November 1945. While in Texas, Rob was given a furlough and was at home with his family in Brooklyn when the A-Bombs were dropped on Japan August 6th and 9th 1945. He was thereupon transferred out of the 2nd ID and assigned to recruiting duties in Chicago, awaiting the time when his point score would become sufficient for a discharge. That occurred on 9 January 1946 at Fort Dix, New Jersey.

Rob reentered civilian life to be employed by Citibank on Wall Street, NY for more than 30 years as a bookkeeper to management, the last ten of which were spent in duties related to the funding of the bank through marketing and trading CDs, commercial paper, and money market instruments. Now retired and living in Sarasota, Florida, he and his wife, Caroline, have a married son, Christopher, and a daughter, Stephanie. They have also been blessed with three grandchildren. Christopher is a civil engineer, a civilian employee of the Army Corps of Engineers in Florida. Stephanie is a National Bank Examiner in Jacksonville, Florida.

Porthcawl Remembered by Rob Smith:

Rob writes: "While in Porthcawl, most of AntiTank Company was billeted in the Miner's Rest, a quaint rest/recuperation home for Welsh Miners. It was very close to the seashore, which the locals referred to as "The Strand". We marched three times a day for meals up a road which followed the beach to another larger facility that had a mess hall [I believe this was a hotel in somewhat disrepair on a rise west of town, where other parts of A.T. Company including me, were billeted ...Ed.]. Being stationed right in the Village of Porthcawl, training was mainly in the form of long marches and physical exercises.

"The amenities at the Miners Rest were few. We slept on a palliasse which was a kind of mattress cover filled with straw,

which we had to make up ourselves upon arrival at the billet. Part of the Army routine was to mop the barracks floor every morning. The Miners Rest was so ancient that the scrub water leaked through the wooden floors to the rooms below, so we were [soon] excused from further mopping details.

"Social life in the Village of Porthcawl was good. It had a cinema that we frequented. I remember seeing the classic film, "Gaslight" with Ingrid Bergman, which at that time was entitled "Murder in Thornton Square" for British audiences. I also remember the many Pubs and room-temperature British pints.

"There was much singing in the Pubs with the locals until the Landlord called "Time please". One popular but bawdy song of that era was "Roll Me Over In The Clover". I believe there was a public dance hall in Porthcawl but my recollections of that are at this time vague.

"It comes to mind that there were also passes for visits to Cardiff and the town of Bridgend. There was also one memorable weekend pass to London [probably coincident with the pass Bill Sheridan described in the December issue. Also granted 12-hour London passes were Virgil Gase, John Rivetti, Ed Norfleet, Nick Uremovich, Bill Hulsey, Bill Rogers, possibly Gilbert Ruebsamen, and me (RC) for Saturday and Sunday, December 1-2, 1944....Ed.] These locations all had facilities for the lodging and entertainment of visiting military personnel...A special treat for me was English fish and chips with vinegar, eaten from a newspaper cone.

"While in Porthcawl, AntiTank Company was ordered to make a 25-mile march with full field equipment as a night exercise. The march took all night, partly through the residential areas and was accompanied by much loud singing, talking and laughing by the marchers, which interrupted the sleep of the locals. The incident was reported to Colonel Carl Duffner, the regimental commander, who as punishment, ordered AntiTank Company to repeat the 25-mile march the next night, this time in strict silence.

"Other recollections of Wales in November '44 include the beautiful countryside, green hills, almost daily rain, and the marvelous accent of the Welsh people."

More About Our "Sister", the 66th Infantry Division:¹

I'm sure you'll recall the piece we did in the March 1997 edition regarding divisions that came to be called our "sisters" because they drew from the same manpower pool as did the 75th ...Students from service-sponsored schools with average ages that probably also qualified them for the 75th's derisive nick name of "diaper division". Both were about as "green" as we were and arrived on the European scene at about the same time we did: Namely, they were the 66th and 106th Infantry Divisions. The

tragedy of the 66th becomes more poignant when one realizes that but for the grace of God and a random selection process, many of us could have been aboard the troopship Leopoldville as members of the 66th when it sank crossing the English Channel on December 24. And how did we avoid the same fate when we sailed across the channel to Le Havre just two weeks earlier? Our biggest problem was sea-sickness...I don't recall ever being worried about being torpedoed.

The S.S. Leopoldville carrying 2235 members of the 66th was torpedoed by the German submarine U-486 at 6pm on December 24, 1944, 5½ miles north the French port of Cherbourg. Incompetence, negligence, ineptitude, maybe even cowardice, all played a part in obscuring and covering up what happened then and later to the 66th. Certainly the American staff at Cherbourg couldn't have been very proud of their dereliction of duty that had contributed so heavily to the disaster...When they should have been on duty to receive and act upon an S.O.S. sent by a foundering ship, they were absent from their posts, partying on Christmas Eve in the notorious port of Cherbourg -- while their buddies drowned outside its harbor. Until 1996, authorities of the American, British, French, as well as Belgian governments conspired to hide the entire incident from those who had a need and right to know. So much secrecy was imposed that today, even the number of casualties resulting from the sinking is not a certainty. Present day sources generally agree, however, that there were 764 victims (763 confirmed), of the sinking and 1471 survivors. Of the victims, 248 had been killed by the torpedo's explosion and the rest (516) died from hypothermia and drowning. The bodies of 493 of the dead were never recovered. The U.S. War Department reported the victims as Missing in Action, even though they were known to have perished, Later, these men were declared KIA to allow payment of insurance benefits. But survivors and families of the dead or missing were told to keep quiet about the incident for security reasons, and no details of their deaths were divulged to their families then or since. They were left in ignorance, forced to find out through their own devices just how and under what circumstances their loved ones had died. It is almost certain that no information has ever been volunteered (though it was certainly known) as to where the recovered bodies of the MIA/KIA soldiers were buried. To have done otherwise the War Department would have broken the longstanding code of silence set up to hide the incident.

Following the actual torpedo impact, the ship stayed afloat for about 2½ hours, Long enough to have saved all but 248, had emergency procedures at the port been available and effective. As the ship sank, heroic but generally shorthanded rescue at-

tempts were made by the port authorities (including Americans) at Cherbourg.

One of the complicating factors affecting rescue attempts that night was that the waters outside the harbor contained mines and the Leopoldville had been drifting towards them until the British convoy commander ordered its anchor dropped. Presumably, that was done by the GI's still aboard, because most if not all of the ship's Belgian crew, with the notable exception of their Captain, had long since abandoned the vessel --- taking most, if not all of the ship's lifeboats with them, which they must have felt was their prerogative. The dropped anchor kept the ship from sustaining further damage from mine explosions...But the down side was that it also prevented the sinking vessel from being towed closer to shore when a tug finally arrived on the scene to do so. Furthermore, the American soldiers left on board were mostly unsuccessful in releasing life rafts secured to the ship's stanchions. None of the crew were left aboard to show them how it was done, so they were only able to cut a few of them loose. Thus, without lifeboats or enough rafts, the remaining troops were left with nothing but life jackets to keep them afloat in the icy 48° water, as the ship sank beneath them.

The fifty year silence on the affair was finally broken in 1996 when British Admiralty records of the event were declassified, having been hidden for political reasons for a half century. The declassification issue was forced by a documentary producer named Larry Bond who had been working in Cherbourg on an unrelated matter for Greenpeace. Here's how that happened: Bond, a diver himself, came across some divers who were doing recreational diving on a sunken shipwreck off shore. He dove with them and soon find himself on the starboard side of a huge ship, the 66-ft wide S.S. Leopoldville, lying on its side in more than 200 feet of water. Curious at finding no mention of a ship with that name in the literature, and being under contract to Reuters, Bond was able to tap their vast resources and found a related article in the Memphis Times that gave an account of the nightmares a survivor of a troopship sinking regularly experienced on Christmas Eve. Bond was able to locate that survivor and interview him, but soon discovered that he, too, was unaware of all that had happened that night in 1944. He could only recall the incident itself and his own rescue when he was able to jump from the side of the sinking troopship he was on (the Leopoldville) onto another ship named "Brilliant". Pursuing the story further, Bond went to the Public Records Office in Kew, England and after a search, found the record he sought. It had been filed under the name "Brilliant", the name of a British destroyer assigned to the convoy in which Leopoldville had sailed for Cherbourg. There was no record whatsoever filed under the

name "Leopoldville", pretty strong evidence of an Admiralty conspiracy to obscure what had happened that night and protect whomever might have been criticized for it. The record gave a complete account of the sinking, its aftereffects, and the results of the inquiry/investigation that followed. It proved that the British Admiralty was well aware of the entire incident and all of its ramifications, including an assignment of responsibility for it. It would never have become public knowledge and the full story told, except for the Memphis survivor's fortuitous recollection of the name "Brilliant".

¹Ed note: Information regarding the Leopoldville sinking was obtained from the following Internet sites: <http://www.historychannel.com/exhibits/leopoldville/story.html>
<http://www.historychannel.com/exhibits/leopoldville/producer.html>
<http://www.historychannel.com/exhibits/leopoldville/survivor.html>
<http://www.historychannel.com/exhibits/leopoldville/monuments.html>

From the M/C staff: *RC (Ray Smith) Editor*

RM (Rob Smith) Publisher/Treasurer

Rudy Gillen, Editor & Publisher Emeritus

AT-290 KIA/WIA and Taps

	<u>KIA</u>	
Francis T. DeVault	4th Plt 2nd Sqd	Near Burtonville,
Belgium		
William P. Hulsey	3rd Plt	21 Jan '45 Petit
Thier		
W.A. Isaacs	1st Plt Sergeant	In Korea
Carl Sieg	1st Plt 1st Sqd	Friendly fire Xmas
'44 Ny, Belgium		
Lino Silvani	2nd Plt	M Co, 39th Inf
Aug'44 Ste Lo, France		

WIA (probably did not return to AT-290 by war's end)

Russell Hedberg	Hdq Plt Recon Sgt	details unknown
(?) Holtzhauser	unk Plt unk Sqd	Shrapnel
in thigh or arm (at Rhine?)		
Fred Marsh	1st Plt 1st Sqd	Easter 1945 - Land mine
Alexander Moir	1st Plt 1st Sqd	Shrapnel, left arm - evac
Niklos Uremovich '44 Ny, Belgium	1st Plt 1st Sqd	Friendly fire, Xmas
Donald Yack	4th Plt 2nd Sqd	Colmar - Feb. '45

Post-War Deceased

Bill(y) B. Black	4th Plt 2nd Sqd	18 Jun 1998 in WV, of an aneurism
Charles Blake	3rd Plt Ldr	1995 (reported BB Jan 96)
Robert C. Coldwell	3rd Plt	1986
Paul W. Costinett	AT CO, pre-Europe	1987 Los Angeles, CA
Woodrow W. Fisher	AT Exec Officer	1960
Lawrence H. Groover	1st Plt 3rd Sqd	Oct 1984 - Smyrna, GA
William F. Groves	Hdq Plt Supply	1999 - Muncie, IN
Charles Grose	AT Recon Officer	
Russell Hedberg	Hdq Plt Recon Sgt	
John Heiterer	AT Company Clerk	12 Jul 1994
Justice Horton	3rd Plt driver	1995
Frank T. Kysar	4th Plt	1992
Joe Lassiter	unknown	1977
Michael Malinak	1st Plt 1st Sqd	
Fred Marsh	1st Plt 1st Sqd	1967
Alexander Moir	1st Plt 1st Sqd	1 Oct 1984- Cleveland, OH
Edward K. Norfleet	1st Plt 3rd Sqd	13 Aug 1989- Venita, OK
Orland H. Parsons	Hdq Plt 1st Sgt	12 Oct 1997- Cincinnati, OH
Lee A. Premazzi	Hdq Plt driver	6 Jan 1997- Portland, OR
Ben G. Premo	4th Plt 1st Sqd	
Dalton D. Raze	1st Plt Ldr	28 Dec 1997- Springfield, VA
William J. Rogers	1st Plt driver	3 June 1999- Springfield, IL - heart
Carol C. Smith	S/Sgt to 2nd Lt	1960
Edward S. Stewart	Hdq Plt Comm Sgt	1991
Willard S. Strawn	4th Plt 2nd Sqd	circa 1988
James B. Vosters	4th Plt Ldr	3 Feb 1997-Miami FL
John P. Webster	Hq Rec Sgt, 2nd Lt	1970

